



Assembly Committee on Environment

Clearinghouse Rule 22-061

March 16, 2023

Good morning, Chair Oldenburg and members of the Committee. My name is Bruce Rheineck, and I am the Groundwater Section Chief for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, for informational purposes, on CR 22-061, related to Groundwater Pollutant Standards (Cycle 10 bacteria).

These proposed amendments to ch. NR 140, Wis. Adm. Code add new groundwater quality standards for Escherichia coli (E. coli) bacteria. E. coli bacteria is a type of coliform bacteria that is used as an indicator of fecal contamination in groundwater. Groundwater quality standards currently exist in ch. NR 140 for total coliform bacteria. The department is proposing to revise the status of total coliform bacteria in ch. NR 140 to make it an indicator parameter.

The proposed rule revisions would remedy the current inconsistency with state and federal regulation of bacteria in public drinking water supplies under the federal Revised Total Coliform Rule, and would no longer compel a regulatory agency to require the owner or operator of a facility, practice or activity to take response action to achieve compliance with a total coliform enforcement standard, even in cases where total coliform bacteria are naturally occurring in the environment. The addition of groundwater standards for E. coli would also better protect public health.

The purpose of establishing groundwater standards is to protect public health. Some types of E. coli bacteria, when consumed, can cause acute (short-term) gastrointestinal illnesses causing diarrhea, abdominal discomfort, nausea, and vomiting. Less common effects are chronic (long-term) and include kidney failure, hepatitis, and bloody diarrhea. E. coli bacteria are a subgroup of coliform bacteria and are considered to be a much more specific indicator of fecal contamination, and the potential for pathogens to be present in drinking water, than total coliform bacteria. Infants and young children, the elderly, and people with compromised immune systems are at the highest risk for illness from pathogens in water.

On behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, we would like to thank you for your time today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

